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ABSTRACT

This document offers materials on stress management used in a workplace literacy project developed by Mercer County Community College (New Jersey) and its partners. The document contains handouts on the following topics: (1) description of learners' typical days and identification of their stress points; (2) what stress is and is not; (3) a description of Type A and Type B behaviors; (4) a pencil-and-paper test to evaluate one's stress; (5) biochemical changes resulting from stress; (6) how to relieve stress; (7) how to visualize to relieve stress; (8) how to relax by breathing deeply and having hobbies; (9) the value of exercise; (10) nutrition's relationship to handling stress; (11) how to cope with deadlines, priorities, and hassles; (12) tips for coping with stress; (13) how to make changes; (14) a list of rights individuals have regarding the demands made on them; and (15) 10 commandments for handling stress. (CML)

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CHANNELING YOUR DONNA REED SYNDROME

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OVERVIEW OF WORKPLACE LITERACY PROJECT

Skills for Tomorrow, NOW

The Workplace Literacy Project resulted from a Department of Education grant, plus in-kind contributions from a partnership with General Motors Inland Fisher Guide Plant, Princeton Plasma Physics Laboratory, and St. Francis Medical Center. The project is an attempt to find solutions to the growing "skills gap" in industry today. More than 25 million Americans cannot read the front page of a newspaper. In addition, workers whose average ages are rising, must produce in a technological environment that may not have existed when they began working. This lack of knowledge makes it difficult to compete in a technologically changing workplace. Moreover, an increasing number of immigrants have entered the workforce with limited English communication skills. In response to this growing need, the Federal government provided a grant to Mercer County Community College and its partners to develop ways to enrich and expand employees' basic workplace knowledge. The aim of the project was also to improve the self-esteem of the participants.

Support for the project was solicited from all levels of company management and the unions. In addition, an advisory council, comprising key management and employees from each company determined the design, goals, and time-frame of the project. Each company provided a liaison person from their site, and MCCC hired a director to manage the program. Employee release time for classes was site-specific.

Participation in the program was voluntary. Information about classes was disseminated through company letters, flyers, union notices, notices included with paychecks, and open forums with supervisors and employees.

The ABLE test was used for normative pre and post testing. Other types of evaluations varied from course to course. MCCC counselors met with each student to discuss present and future educational objectives.

Courses were offered in reading, business writing, math, science, and English as a Second Language. In addition, there were workshops in problem solving, stress management, and other work survival skills. The curricula for the courses were customized for each worksite to be as job focused as possible.

It is our hope that this program will serve as a model for other organizations to empower their employees with the skills needed to succeed in the changing technological workplace, today and in the future.

A Typical Day - Exercise

Describe a typical day in your life.

List major stress points.

ASPECTS OF STRESS

Stress is hard to define. What causes unwanted symptoms for some people energizes others. Below are some aspects of stress that might help you better understand what it is and is not:

STRESS IS NOT:

- * a simple problem with a simple solution
- * likely to be solved in "The National Enquirer"
- * easily separated into work and non-work issues
- * something to be totally eliminated

STRESS IS

- * the body's response to the demands and challenges we encounter in everyday life;
i.e., fight or flight response
- * a major factor in physical and mental well being
- * different things to different people
- * greater in times of change and uncertainty

TYPE A AND TYPE B PERSONALITIES

Some behavioral scientists and physicians believe that a person's life style and behavior affect the way he or she reacts to pressure, challenge, and stress. Cardiologists Dr. Meyer Friedman and Dr. Ray Rosenman of the Harold Brunn Institute for Cardiovascular Research in San Francisco have written about a behavior pattern that is likely to produce heart attack or health problems.

This behavior pattern is referred to as "Type A." The Type A person has an intensive drive to get things done. Type A's live by the clock; they are always in a hurry and become impatient when things move slowly. They keep imposing deadlines on themselves. Type A's respond to stress by working even harder and faster. Type A's react to situations that others ignore, so they live under nearly constant stress--stress that is often created largely by themselves.

The opposite of the Type A pattern is called "Type B." The Type B person doesn't have a chronic desire to "beat the clock." Type B's may have as much ambition as Type A's, but this kind of person is able to relax even under stress. Type B knows the value of "taking a break." As a result, Type B rarely have heart attacks.

Type B can walk away from an unfinished task at the end of the day, forget about it, and return to complete it later. Type A will work overtime, or stay awake all night worrying about it. Type B rarely rushes and does not try to hurry others; Type A tends to do both.

These types are extremes, of course, meant to illustrate a behavior pattern that not only responds negatively to stress, but creates its own additional stress. Different events will create different behaviors in all of us, depending upon our perceptions, our disposition, or the situation.

The business and professional world usually encourage Type A behavior. Everyone wants people to work harder and harder, to get more and more done. Type A responses are usually rewarded with no recognition of the toll this behavior takes on a person's health over time.

Our personal behavior patterns are difficult to change. But it is important to recognize habitual Type A behavior so we can slow our pace temporarily. A vacation, a short break from the work setting, or just "doing nothing" for a while will renew energy and increase a person's productivity in the long run.

STRESS: WHAT WILL YOU DO ABOUT IT?

It is the perfect time to break away from bad habits and start taking positive action to escape the stress trap. Just how vulnerable are you to stress? Lyle H. Miller and Alma Dell Smith of the Boston University Medical Center developed the following test to help you make a quick assessment. Score each item from 1 (almost always) to 5 (never), according to how much of the time each statement applies to you.

- _____ 1. I eat at least one hot, balanced meal a day.
- _____ 2. I get seven to eight hours sleep at least four nights a week.
- _____ 3. I give and receive affection regularly.
- _____ 4. I have at least one relative within 50 miles on whom I can rely.
- _____ 5. I exercise to the point of perspiration at least twice a week.
- _____ 6. I smoke less than half a pack of cigarettes a day.
- _____ 7. I take fewer than five alcoholic drinks a week.
- _____ 8. I am the appropriate weight for my height.
- _____ 9. I have an income adequate to meet expenses.
- _____ 10. I get strength from my religious beliefs.
- _____ 11. I regularly attend club or social activities.
- _____ 12. I have a network of friends and acquaintances.
- _____ 13. I have one or more friends to confide in about personal matters.
- _____ 14. I am in good health.
- _____ 15. I am able to speak openly about my feelings when angry or worried.
- _____ 16. I have regular conversations with the people I live with about domestic problems; for example, chores, money, and daily living issues.
- _____ 17. I do something for fun at least once a week.
- _____ 18. I am able to organize my time effectively.
- _____ 19. I drink fewer than three cups of coffee (or tea or cola drinks) during the day.
- _____ 20. I take quiet time for myself during the day.

_____ TOTAL

To get your score, add up the figures and subtract 20. Any number over 30 indicates a vulnerability to stress. You are seriously vulnerable if your score is between 50 and 75, and extremely vulnerable if it is over 75.

How well did you fare? If you are not pleased with the tally, take a deep breath and commit yourself to positive action! Success begins with you. One step at a time. One day at a time. YOU must choose the changes you want to make.

BIOCHEMICAL CHANGES FROM STRESS

STRESS REACTIONS:

Adrenalin begins to flow
Lymphatic Gland Shrinks by 28%
Heart and breathing rate goes up 25%
Ready to form scabs
Bronchi dilates
Blood goes to vital organs
Begin to sweat
Pupils begin to dilate
Senses are more acute
Brain wave patterns change

ALARM

The body prepares to fight or flight

RESISTANCE

Body repairs damage, rests, and gets stronger

EXHAUSTION

BODY BEGINS TO BREAK DOWN

Dr. Hans Selye first noted

THINGS WE CAN DO TO HELP RELIEVE STRESS

Relaxation

Island escape

Deep breathing

Vizualization-Guided imagery

Affirmations

Exercise

Good nutrition

FOUR AFFIRMATIONS WE SHOULD SAY DAILY

I am competent

I am attractive

I am respected

I own this day!

VISUALIZE TO RELAXATION

Mental imagery is another effective method of reducing stress. A little like a daydream, mental imagery uses both sight and sound to help you relax:

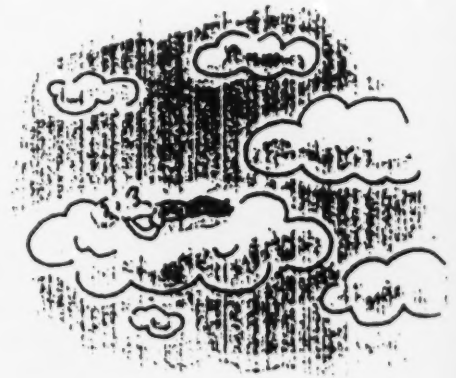
1. Get into a comfortable position sitting or lying down.
2. Close your eyes. Breathe out very slowly and easily. Breathe in. Slowly, breathe out. Continue until your breathing becomes smooth and rhythmic.
3. Visualize a peaceful, relaxing scene. Try one of the images below or make up one of your own:

**** Picture yourself walking on a deserted beach. Hear the gentle hiss of the waves coming ashore. Feel the soft sand under your feet. Let the warmth of the sun untie the knots of tension all over your body.

**** Place yourself on a mountaintop with a tropical garden just below. See the glistening dew on the surrounding trees. Listen for the sound of a waterfall in the distance.

**** Envision a cloud floating down, enveloping you and supporting you completely as you float away. Feel the air as it flows over your body. Listen to the the calming winds.

**** Imagine you're resting under a willow tree next to a lake. Listen to the leaves rustle overhead and the gentle lapping of the water. Look at a nearby field of multicolored wildflowers.



RELAXATION

Deep breathing:

Why is deep breathing recommended? Because it is a form of muscle relaxation.

How to do deep abdominal breathing:

1. Sit in a comfortable position, arms at your sides, shoulders relaxed.
2. Exhale as completely as you can, through your mouth, with the chest and abdominal area collapsing and falling inward.
3. Begin to inhale slowing through your nose, making your abdomen rise. Your chest, rib cage, and shoulders should not move at all. Only the abdomen swells as the lower lungs fill with air.

In this type of breathing your stomach goes out to inhale and is sucked in to exhale.

4. Practice 10-15 cycles.
5. When this feels comfortable to you, practice deep abdominal breathing as you sit, stand, and walk.

How having a hobby can help relieve your stress:

Relaxing does not mean sitting idly doing nothing. Hobbies are an excellent way to relax because:

- *Hobbies require focused attention, thus taking your mind off your worries.
- *Hobbies give you personal satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment--they're something good you can do for yourself.
- *Hobbies are entirely under your control, and the more control you have, the less stress you feel.

EXERCISE

How exercise increases your energy level:

How energetic you feel depends on your maximum oxygen capacity (the total amount of oxygen you utilize from the air you breathe). The more oxygen you breathe in from the air, the more energy and stamina you will have. Regular exercise increases your body's ability to draw more oxygen out of the air you breathe.

How to find time to exercise with a busy schedule:

1. Remind yourself that time for your health and stamina is as important as anything else in your schedule. You won't be able to get anything done if you're in the hospital recovering from a heart attack or home with the flu because your body's resistance level was low.
2. If you see exercise as a time-robber, remember that it's because of exercise that you will feel more energetic and able to accomplish more in less time.

Another reason to exercise:

Exercise makes your muscles more flexible. If your muscles are flexible, you won't tire as easily when you are forced to sit in one position for long periods of time.

Researches at the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta reviewed 43 previous studies and found a consistent, statistically significant association between lack of exercise and heart disease.

The many benefits of walking:

Fred Stutman, M.D., author of Walk, Don't Run and one of the world's foremost authorities on the medical benefits of walking, has identified the following benefits of walking:

1. Walking lowers the blood pressure.
2. Walking controls stress by increasing the relaxation hormones in the brain.
3. Walking promotes weight loss and weight control by burning calories.

NUTRITION

Caffeine stimulates the stress hormones:

Caffeine elevates blood cholesterol, reduces iron in the blood and contributes to anxiety, restlessness, insomnia, headaches, diarrhea and heart palpitations says Susan Beuchamp, Research Director of the American Physical Fitness Research Institute in Los Angeles. Caffeine also imitates the stress-hormones and can trigger anxiety symptoms. Another reason not to drink coffee: Caffeine is a diuretic, which means that it flushes water out of your body. Loss of body water results in lethargy and muscular discomfort. And don't think that you have to be sweating profusely to be losing water. Your body loses water naturally: a lot of water evaporates through the skin and lungs.

What's a sure way to gain weight?

Go on successive diets. Researchers at the Arizona State University studied cyclical dieters--women who ate 1000 calories a day for 7-10 days at least four times a year. They were compared to women non-dieters of similar weight and height. The dieters had a higher percentage of body fat. What's more, the dieters burned fewer calories when exercising, because the "starvation" conditions of their successive diets had decreased their resting metabolic rate.

Why is fish a good choice for lunch?

Fish is the food to choose for alertness and keeping your wits their sharpest because it has dopamine and norephrine, two chemicals vital for smooth brain functioning, reports Judith Wurtman in Managing Your Mind and Mood Through Food.

Sweet foods and greasy foods make you feel tired.

Why? Because it takes the body longer to digest fats, so your body is diverting blood from your brain to your stomach. It's the same reason not to eat big, heavy meals. Your body will be pumping blood to your stomach, away from your brain, and that will slow you down.

COPING WITH DEADLINES, PRIORITIES, AND HASSLES

How to not "go crazy" over deadlines:

The major causes of going crazy over deadlines are procrastination and perfectionism. A deadline is simply a time frame allotted to a task. The first step when you receive a project with a deadline is to establish what you want to achieve on this project. Be specific: List the action steps you'll need to take in order to achieve your goal. Rank these steps in order of their importance so that you do the most important ones first. Assign a time frame to each step, so that you move steadily from step to step. Most important, avoid perfectionism. Trying to be perfect takes an incredible amount of energy--and it's energy misspent, because you don't need to be perfect in order to be effective. In fact, you'll find that 20 percent of your efforts will achieve 80 percent of your results. Finally, don't forget to delegate and enlist the help of others.

How you can cope when several people come to you with "top priority" projects:

Be clear on your own goals and priorities. Then, choose to do first the tasks that are most in line with those priorities. How about when you report to two bosses? Ask them to clarify priorities between them.

Ever find yourself with an "anger hangover"?

That's when you keep replaying stressful moments over and over again in your mind. If you catch yourself doing this, yell "Stop!" to yourself. You see, your body reacts to what your mind perceives. Even though your mind is merely thinking about a stressful event (and it's not actually occurring), your body will respond with the same stress reaction as if it actually were happening. Don't replay those stressful moments and compound your stress.

A simple way for keeping daily "hassles" to a minimum--and feeling less frustrated by them:

When running errands, do them at off-peak hours so that you don't have to wait in lines. Bring along something else to do in case you're delayed. That way, you won't think of it as wasted time. You'll focus on something else, not your anger. Also, deep breathing always helps relieve your rising stress level. And don't forget positive self-talk.

GET A GRIP ON STRESS

Organize

Manage your time and your environment. Plan what you have to do and what you want to do. Learn to set and stick to priorities.

Balance work with play

You probably schedule your working day very carefully. Leave a little time for recreation. "All work and no play..."

Loaf a little

Too much inactivity causes boredom, which causes stress -- but a few moments every day may help to refresh you.

Get enough sleep and rest

Lack of enough sleep will make you irritable. Stress can interfere with sound sleep so make sure you don't cut back the amount.

Take a mental vacation

Take five minutes from your work and focus on a pleasant scene.

Compartmentalize your stressors

Leave work problems at work and home problems at home.

Learn to accept what you cannot change

Acceptance will prevent the feeling of not being in control.

Talk out your troubles

Confide in someone you trust and respect. Someone else may be able to show you a way out of your problems or help you to see them in a new light.

Take one thing at a time

Establish priorities. You can't tackle everything at once. Start with the most important task and move forward.

Give in once in awhile

If your stress comes from other people, don't always insist on being right or doing things your way. Others may give in

too.

Keep a worry list

Write down what you worry about. Once you've committed the worry to paper you can let go of them.

Limit your worry time

Worry about whatever you like, but only at a specific time.

Smile!

Three 2-minute energy builders you can do at your desk to overcome afternoon fatigue:

1. Make a fantasy phone call to a travel agent. Imagine yourself calling the travel agent: Tell him or her where you'd like to go, what kind of hotels you'd like to stay in, what sort of activities you'd like to do. Taking this mental vacation gives you the kind of diversion you need when you're feeling sluggish.
2. Do the energy shake: Stretch your arms out for five seconds, then let go. Then, tighten and relax each fist. Next, let your wrists go limp and then shake them as if you were trying to dry them. Loosen up. The energy shake gives you a relaxed--and at the same time energized--feeling because it increases the circulation to your arms and legs. The brain feels most awake and alive when it has a fresh supply of oxygen. When you exercise, you get blood moving through your body to your brain, carrying that fresh supply of oxygen with it.
3. Listen to some music. One idea is to make a tape of some of your favorite songs. Then, put on your headphones and listen. Let yourself be absorbed in the music--use it to regain that happy mood.

TIPS TO HELP CONTROL STRESS AT HOME

- *Stock up on things to keep your home life smoother.
- *Get as much help as you can--don't play superperson.
- *Take time for you--do something that relaxes you.
- *Organize time by making and using lists. (cross off)
- *Slow down--don't hurry--don't overbook your time.
- *Take enjoyment in chores.
- *Exercise--the body needs to purge itself of the stress poison it accumulates daily.
- *Eat right--balanced meals not rushed.

TIPS TO HELP CONTROL STRESS ON THE JOB

- *Start the day prepared with a good attitude.
 - *Set priorities--do important things first.
 - *Take time to plan--time management techniques add 30 minutes to your day.
 - *Take control of paperwork--it breathes stress.
(Life Raft)
 - R refer it and pass it along
 - A act on it and throw it away
 - F file it for later
 - T toss it in the trash
 - *Watch your inability to say "no."
 - We want to do it all (ego and pride).
 - We don't want to offend others.
 - We feel it is selfish to put our needs before others.
 - Get over the guilt to saying no--cuts down on stress.
- Reminders of how to say no
- *Be honest and direct
 - *Don't be offensive
 - *Be brief
 - *Use positives (softens the blow)
 - *Be firm
 - *Stick to your guns

IT IS UP TO YOU TO TAKE CHARGE OF STRESS!

HOW TO MAKE CHANGES

1. Change is a slow process demanding conscious effort and commitment. Trying to speed the process up may only result in frustration. Give yourself some time before you expect any changes to happen. (You can't lose 20 pounds overnight.)
2. Change needs to be self-motivated. When you try changing something for someone else, it seldom lasts for long. For instance, smoking is something you'll want to reward yourself with during arguments if you quit because your partner hates it. Change works best when it is for you.
3. Consider change as a process that hates demands. Whenever you consider a change as an absolute must, you increase your chances of failure. Pressure doesn't increase success, it increases resistance. Imagine being told that anger is unacceptable, versus, "We'd like you to learn some acceptable ways of expressing your anger." The demand generates anxiety and frustration, whereas choices provide a sense of possibility.
4. When change does occur, it is not always visible. You expect to see results, which sometimes are not clear or immediate. Communication and problem-solving techniques need to be practiced before they become skills--and over time you are frequently too close to see your own change taking place.
5. Consider keeping a journal or notebook to record moods, patterns, stresses, etc. This will help you see yourself as honestly as possible and decide where change should begin.
6. There is a tendency to start with big changes, such as "I'm going to stop being so irritable and demanding." But trying such big changes is the best way to fail. Stress management is not the change of one's personality, the elimination of drive, or the repression of emotion. It is balancing that drive, push, and emotion with common sense. Slow down and take one easy change at a time. Intentionally eating a good breakfast, driving slower to work, or taking a break that involves walking, stretching, or listening to relaxing music is much easier than trying to erase those irritable and demanding parts of your personality. And those changes will come.

MY RIGHTS

- ** Right to be treated with respect
Excuse me
- ** Say "No" without guilt
- ** Express your feelings
Talk with people
- ** Slow down and think
- ** Change my mind
- ** Ask for what I want
- ** Do Less than all of it
- ** Ask for information
- ** To make mistakes
- **** To feel good about me

The Ten Commandments For Handling Stress

1. Thou shalt acknowledge that stress is a fact of life!
2. Thou shalt listen to your body, it is trying to tell you something.
3. Thou shalt seek silences and let time be your friend.
4. Thou shalt not allow negative emotions to get bottled-up inside you.
5. Thou shalt practice cooperation instead of unnecessary competition.
6. Thou shalt know that there is no failure, only the opportunity to learn from mistakes.
7. Thou shalt refrain from self-criticism and perfectionism!
8. Thou shalt have balance in your life.
9. Thou shalt stop trying to be someone else.
10. Above all, thou shalt place a proper value on yourself.

Stress is born from the life within;
you are the source, you are the cure.

But first, you must choose to see
the world differently.

The key is learning to love yourself.
Simplify, trust, and let go...

Ilene McMahon Cummings